



MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Some of the participants engaged in your training program may be undergoing an enormous amount of change. Although many are highly skilled, they could be learning new occupational skills, pursuing new career paths, and seeking employment in a very competitive labor market. For some program participants, these changes, including having to go on interviews after being in the same job or industry for many years, can be anxiety-producing and overwhelming. Without proper support and guidance, those who are struggling with change may not be able to complete a rigorous course of instruction or may lack the confidence needed to secure employment.



Motivational interviewing is a style of communication that can be used to strengthen a participant's commitment to change. It can also improve your program's

recruitment, training, and placement outcomes and help reduce staff stress. This bulletin will provide a brief overview of this collaborative, goal-oriented method of communication and give several practical techniques for helping participants fully engage in your program's activities. It will give you guidance on how to resolve ambivalence, how to deal with resistance, and how to elicit "change talk."

AN OVERVIEW

There are several interview techniques and principles that characterize motivational interviewing. These include:

- ☞ **Build good rapport** - Draw out concerns and reasons for change and understand a participant's point of view. Motivational interviewing does *not* rely on your ability to persuade them of the need for change.

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- ☞ **Resolve ambivalence** - Help a participant identify and resolve any ambivalence he or she may have toward change. Rather than tell them why they need to change, ask them questions that help them identify their own reasons for change.

- ☞ **Roll with resistance** - Roll with any resistance. Don't argue or debate because this only serves to stiffen a person's resistance to change.

- ☞ **Support self-efficacy** - Remind the participant of their strengths and past successes and affirm all of their efforts toward change. A participant is more likely to complete a training program and secure work if he/she freely chooses to do so and has a firm belief that he/she can accomplish these goals.

- ☞ **Listen for change talk** - Change talk is usually associated with positive outcomes. You want to encourage it, listen for it and affirm it.

RESOLVING AMBIVALENCE

People contemplating change typically experience ambivalence. While part of them may embrace



change, part of them may be resistant to it. Ambivalence may show itself in several ways. A participant may, for example, tell you how much he/she values the

training your program provides, but the poor attendance record tells you otherwise.

Ambivalence is normal, acceptable and understandable. Helping a participant resolve ambivalence is a key step in facilitating change.



There are several ways a workforce development professional can help a participant understand and resolve ambivalence. These include using open-ended questions and reflections. Here are some

examples of open-ended questions that can be used to help a participant recognize and resolve ambivalence:

- ☞ “What are your thoughts about entering a training program?”
- ☞ “What supports do you think you need to successfully complete our program?”
- ☞ “What concerns do you have about finding employment?”
- ☞ “What challenge do you expect to face in your search for employment?”
- ☞ “How can I help you with some of the difficulties you are experiencing?”

The use of reflections can also be helpful in resolving ambivalence. For example, you might say, “On one hand, I feel that you are eager to participate in the program. But on the other hand, I have the sense that you are reluctant to complete your application.” At that point, you want the client to “process” what you have said and respond to it. You want them to resolve their ambivalence with you serving as a guide.

Another way of helping a client understand and resolve ambivalence is to use an ambivalence ruler:



You ask the participant to indicate how important this change is to them. If, for example, they point to “4,” you can ask, “Why not higher?” or “What would it take to get you to “5” or “6?” This

technique not only allows the participant to identify his or her level of ambivalence, it also gives them the opportunity to find a way for resolving it.

ROLLING WITH RESISTANCE

Change can be discomforting and people tend to resist it. If a participant is resistant to change, it’s counterproductive to argue with them, to nag them, to shame them, to scold them or to pressure them. Rather, you want to roll with resistance. You want to help a participant explore the pros and cons of change. You want to step back, listen, and try to understand things from the client’s perspective. You want to guide not direct. You want to consult, not instruct. Here’s an example:



Program Participant: “You’re only half my age! You don’t know what it’s like to be unemployed at 56. I want to talk to someone who is older.”

Case Manager: “You feel that I can’t understand where you are coming from? I can look into that if that continues to be important to you. I don’t want to put any obstacles in your way to becoming employed.”

LISTENING FOR CHANGE TALK



A participant’s words can help you predict the degree to which they are ready to embrace change. It’s important to encourage and listen for change talk and provide affirmation and positive reinforcement

when you hear it. To encourage change talk, you might want to consider questions such as:

- ☞ “What would be the good things for you if you completed this course of instruction?”
- ☞ “What makes you think you need this training?”
- ☞ “What would your life look like three years from now if you received this credential?”

- ☞ “What would be different for you if you received this credential?”
- ☞ “What would make your time here interesting and useful for you?”
- ☞ “How can we partner with you to meet your goals?”
- ☞ “What is the goal you would like to achieve while you are here?”

Here are some examples of change talk that you can listen for and affirm:

- ☞ “I really want to get that credential.”
- ☞ “I got through college. I know I can complete this training.”
- ☞ “Getting that credential would really put my career back on track. I really need to complete this course.”
- ☞ “I’m ready to start!”

When you hear change talk, reflect on it, reinforce it, and ask for more!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about motivational interviewing, visit <http://www.motivationalinterview.org/>.

